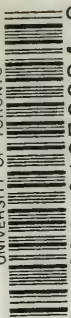


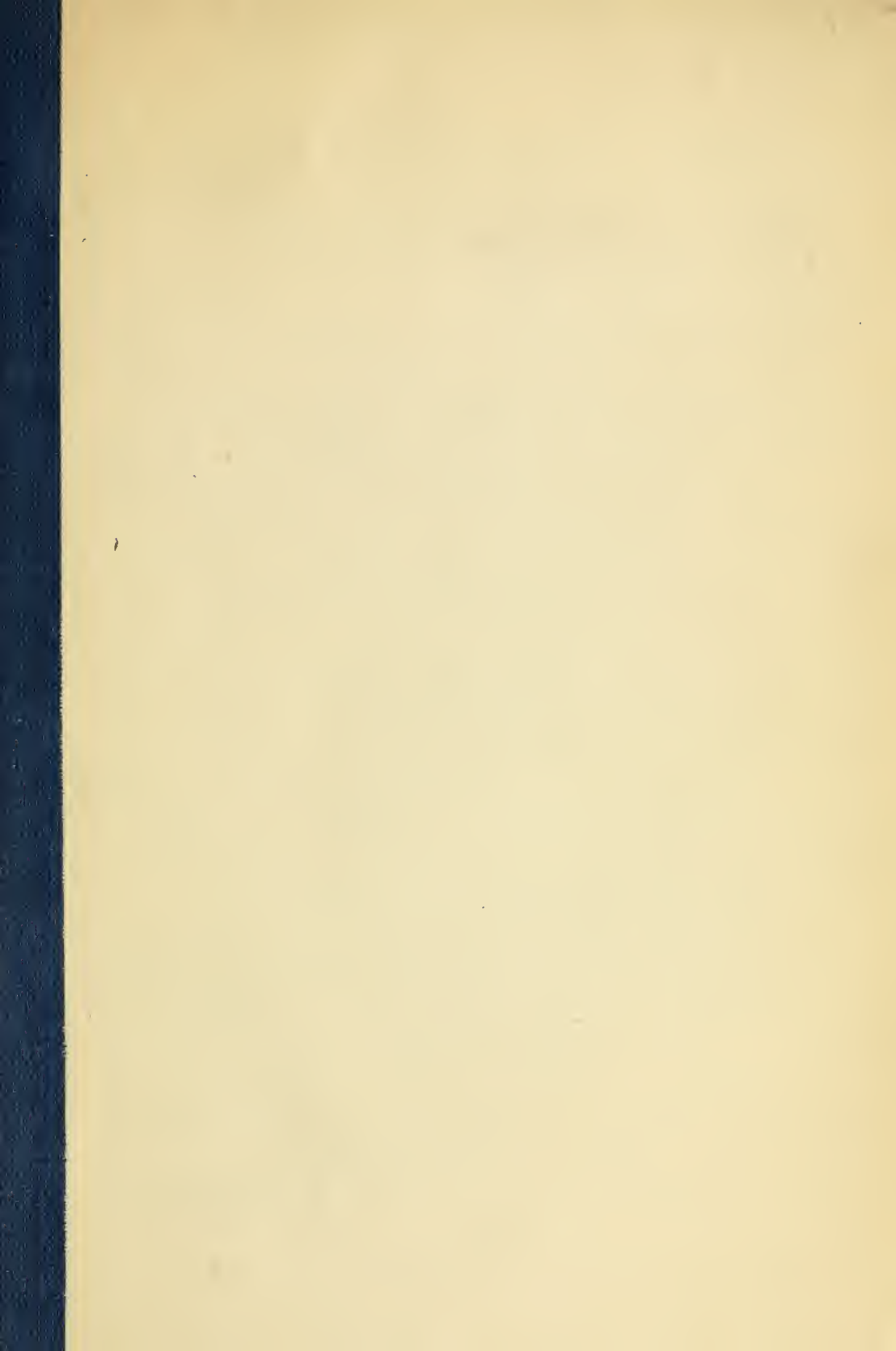
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01073384 8

PA
348
A6
B45
c. 1
ROBA







Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

182058
6.7.23

THE GREEK AORIST.

ANDREW J. BELL, M.A., PH.D., TORONTO.

The aorist has been termed the Proteus of tenses; not ineptly, whether we regard its forms or the meanings which it can and does express. With regard to form we have two classes of aorists: the first, or weak, and the second, or strong; the first being the sigmatic aorist ending in α , though all sigmatic aorists do not end in α (witness $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\epsilon\sigma\sigma\omicron\nu$), and we have aorists ending in α that are not sigmatic and to all appearance never were, *e.g.*, $\acute{\epsilon}\delta\omega\kappa\alpha$, $\acute{\epsilon}\iota\pi\alpha$, $\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$. The first important contribution to the investigation of this tense was made by Philip Buttmann, who, in his *Ausführliche Griechische Grammatik*, stated with such cogency his reasons for believing that the second aorist was the older and simpler form, and that the first aorist was a later formation, developed from the present, that the point has not since been disputed. But his further conclusion that this second, or strong aorist, is the oldest form of the finite verb, being based on evidence which Buttmann, at that early stage of inquiry into sounds and forms, could not be expected to interpret rightly, has not met with such general acceptance. It is the evidence for this view that I wish to examine now, in view of the results won from our further study of forms and syntax.

In the examination of a grammatical form three things must be kept in view: (1) The meaning, or meanings, expressed by the form; (2) the nature of the form itself; (3) the information, if any, given about it by the people who used it and knew it in its living force. It is because Delbrück, for example, gives so little heed to the nature of grammatical forms, concentrating his attention, as he has done in all his works, on the meanings that the form is capable of expressing, that the scattered hints that Brugmann gives us occasionally in the course of his *Theory of Sounds and Forms* seem so much more luminous for syntax than the learning accumulated in the two bulky volumes of *Comparative Syntax* that Delbrück has given us. I have placed the meaning first, not because I regard it as of more value than the form as a guide to the original force of a grammatical inflexion, but because the evidence it gives seems, at first sight, so much clearer and easier to grasp. Whether it is

really so we shall have some opportunity of seeing as we deal with this question.

What, then, is the meaning of the Greek aorist?—or, to be more precise, what is the time denoted by this tense? The answer at first seems obvious enough. It is a past tense; according to Dionysius Thrax, one of the four varieties or *διαφοραί* of the *χρόνος παρεληλυθώς*, which are the *παρατατικός*, the *παρακείμενος*, the *ὑπερσυντελικός* and the *ἀόριστος*; and while our modern grammars do not follow him in regarding the *χρόνος παρακείμενος* as a past tense, they all give the aorist a place among the historical tenses or preterites. But it is noteworthy that this tense alone of the historical tenses has forms for all the moods; that we find an aorist subjunctive, an aorist optative, as well as an aorist indicative. Is the aorist subjunctive a past tense? “No,” answers Apollonius Dyscolus, in the first syntax produced in the Western world, “for the time relation belonging to the indicative disappears as soon as we change the indicative to another mood.” This is the reason, of course, why the augment, a mark of absolute past time, is attached to the indicative only. In the other moods, Apollonius thinks the aorist expresses *συντέλεια* or *ἄνυσις* as opposed to the *παρατασις* of the present. But the force of completion appears to belong rather to the perfect in classic Greek, and the meaning of the aorist is often rather inceptive or ingressive. But I don’t wish to dwell on this; the fact to which I wish to call your attention is that the aorist alone of historical tenses has forms for all moods, which, it is admitted by all, never denote past time in the subjunctive, and denote past time in the optative only after verbs of declaring, *i.e.*, in indirect discourse,—a secondary use of the optative. Dionysius speaks of the perfect as one of the varieties of the past, *i.e.*, as a preterite or historical tense, and it has forms for all the moods. But we know that primarily the perfect was not a preterite, but a completed present, as, *e.g.*, *κέκτημαι* or *μέμνημαι*, or *οἶδα*; that its use as a preterite belongs to later Greek; and that it is as a completed present that it develops these forms for the subjunctive and optative. Might it not be logical to suppose that the aorist, too, was not primarily a past tense, and that it was not as a past tense that it developed these modal forms?

But what meanings does the aorist express in the indicative? It denotes the simple occurrence of an act in past time, as in *νιξ ἐγένετο*, as opposed to the imperfect in *νιξ ἐγγίνετο*. Buttmann says the aorist leaves the present out of view, transports us to the past and relates in succession the events that occurred there. But Apollonius Dyscolus tells us that the aorist with *πάλαί* is rather a pluperfect; “for,” he adds, “the aorist embraces the preteritive meanings of the perfect and the pluperfect, just as among nouns there are those to which the masculine

and the feminine gender is common." Is, then, the aorist used for the pluperfect? It is certainly used as an equivalent for the Latin pluperfect. *Hoc scripseras, ubi amicus advenit*, is in Greek, *Τοῦτο ἔγραψα, ὅτε ἦλθεν ὁ φίλος*. So in Thucy. II. 92, *ἐτράποντο εἰς τὸν πάνορμον, ὅθεν περ ἀνηγάγοντο*, and we translate the aorist here by the English pluperfect. Farrar says, "Never translate the aorist by *have*:" but Thompson owns that we at times use a perfect where the Greeks use an aorist, and refers to Soph. Aj. 586, *ἐπῆνεσ' ἔργον καὶ πρόνοιαν ἣν ἔθου*, "I praise thy deed and the foresight thou hast shown." But in classic Greek the perfect and pluperfect are not tenses in the proper sense of the term, but rather modes of action, being presents and imperfects of completed action; and it is the preteritive meanings which these tenses assume later that Apollonius has in view. Still such a use of the aorist as is found in Matt. iii. 17, *οὗτός ἐστιν υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα*, resembles the Greek perfect in its primary sense very closely. It is not used, to my knowledge, in the primary sense of the imperfect; even in case of verbs that imply duration; its force is inceptive, *e. g.*, *ἐνόσησα*, "I fell ill," *ἐσίγησα*, "I became silent."

These are varieties in its use as a preterite; but it does not always designate past time. At times we have to translate it by a present: So in *ἐπῆνεσ' ἔργον καὶ πρόνοιαν ἣν ἔθου*, and in Aj. 682, *ἔφριξ' ἔρωτι περιχαρῆς δ' ἀνεπτομην*, which are instantaneous, or, as some grammarians call them, emphatic presents. Then in Il. 16, 482, *ἦριπε δ' ὥς ὅτε τις δρυὶς ἦριπεν ἢ ἀχερωῖς* ("And he fell as falls an oak or a silver poplar."—*Lang*). And in Il. 17, 173, *νῦν δέ σευ ὤνοσάμην πάγχυ φρένας* ("But now think I altogether scorn of thy wisdom."—*Lang*). Brugmann translates *ὤνοσάμην* as a present perfect here ("bin ich Toller geworden"), and adds, "This use is found in Slavic and Vedic (being extremely frequent in the latter), and must be regarded as belonging to the primitive Indo-Germanic. In Il. 9, 320, *κάτθαν' ὁμῶς ὃ τ' ἀεργὸς ἀνὴρ ὃ τε πολλὰ ἐοργῶς* ("Death cometh alike to the untiring and to him that hath toiled long."—*Lang*) we have a gnomic aorist, as in *πολλὰ παρὰ γνώμην ἔπесεν*. But the aorist does not here denote past time, it rather denotes what is true at any time, whether past, present or future. And the aorist is used for the future, not merely in the infinitive as in *μέλλω ποιῆσαι*, a very frequent use, but in the indicative. Brugmann notes, Il. 4, 160,

*εἴπερ γάρ τε καὶ αὐτιχ' Ὀλὶμπιος οὐκ ἐτέλεσσεν
εἴκ δε καὶ ὀφεί τελεῖ, σὺν τε μεγαλῶ ἀπέτισαν;*

and Il. 9, 412:

*εἰμέν κ' αἶθι μένων Τρώων πόλιν ἀμφιμάχωμαι
ᾤλετο μὲν μοι νόστος, ἀτὰρ κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται;*

and conjectures that these future uses are to be connected with the unaugmented or injunctive forms of the aorist stem. The aorist, then, is used to express an act taking place in the past, present or future; or what is true at any time, whether past, present or future. It is also used to express an act never accomplished in either past, present or future. So *e.g.*, in Eurip. Ion., 1291, ἔκτεινα δ' ὄντα πολέμιον δόμοις ἔμοις, or Xenophon, Anab., II., 6, 4, ἐκ τούτου καὶ ἐθανατώθη ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Σπάρτῃ τελεῶν ὥς ἀπειθῶν. Sophocles plays on this use of the aorist in Ajax, 1126-7 :

Μεν. δίκαια γὰρ τὸν εὐτυχεῖν κτείναντά με;

Τευ. κτείναντα; δεινόν γ' εἶπας, εἰ καὶ ζῆς θανών.

These uses, thinks Brugmann, are not inceptive, but are to be explained from this, that the verbs in question give merely the action of the subject, not the result or effect on the object. But this seems merely a special case of the inceptive or ingressive use of the aorist. Now are we to suppose, as one might if he judged simply from the Englishman's standpoint, that the Greek aorist had the force of the pluperfect, or the perfect, or the imperfect, or a simple past, or a present, or a future? Absurd! An examination of the form of this tense will, I think, show that these uses can be reduced to three, a primitive use, and two others easily derived from it.

What of the form of the so-called second, or strong aorist? Compare ἔστην with ἔστησα, or with βουλεύσασαιμι. It shows augment, root, personal ending. But the augment is originally an independent word, probably a locative of the pronominal stem *ο*, the stem of the Latin pronoun *is*, and means *there* or *then*, *in that place* or *at that time*. That it is not an essential part of the strong aorist is clear from its frequent omission in Homer. If we leave it out of account, we have merely the root and the personal ending, but nothing whatever to indicate tense.

What of the name given by the Greeks to this tense?—the *χρόνος ἀόριστος*, or indefinite tense. Dionysius and Apollonius understand it of an indefinite past; but there is nothing in the name to limit its meaning in this way. This tense, then, the Greeks called the indefinite tense. There is in its form no mark, such as we find in other tenses, to indicate time, and it may be used to denote acts that have occurred in present, past, or future time, or that are likely so to occur, or that were merely planned but never accomplished. The one limitation to its meaning seems to be that it never denotes duration, and perhaps this must be qualified, for Brugmann thinks that the form *τίθης*, the second sing. pres. indic. of *τίθημι*, is an unaugmented aorist or injunctive form. The present should have been *τίθησι* cf. ἔσμι, ἔσσι.

What, then, was this tense originally? "We must assume for the Greek verb," says Buttmann, "an older period, when a definite and dis-

ting present did not yet exist" (*i.e.*, behind the tenses of verbs there was a tenseless or a timeless form from which they developed). "There was only one form for the relation of what had happened, was happening, or was about to happen—an aorist—a timeless form. This form was the strong aorist, the primary form of the Greek verb, from which all tenses and moods were developed." For moods, Brugmann recognizes the existence of such forms, and calls them injunctives. They are used as indicatives, present or past, as voluntative subjunctives, as imperatives, and as futures. They are unaugmented aorists, he says, and he takes as an example of them the Sanskrit *bharat* = $\varphi\epsilon\rho\epsilon(\tau)$. He does not think of these injunctives as constituting a separate mood, but as the oldest forms of the finite verb, representing a stage in its development when the moods had as yet found no separate and distinct means of expression.

But while Brugmann gives the unaugmented strong aorist this place for moods, he holds an entirely different opinion with regard to tenses; for he does not hold with Goodwin that the subjunctive and optative are merely developed futures, nor does he see the force of the indicative ending. In his Greek Syntax he says, "The present indicative is in itself timeless, and denotes originally no definite period of time. Hence in Greek, as in the original Indo-Germanic, it was used alike for the present, the past (as Hist. Pres.) and the future, *i.e.*, for all times alike." I have two objections to make to this statement: (1) It will be difficult to prove that in the original Indo-Germanic the present was used for present, past, and future time. It is true that the use of the Hist. Present in the Vedas is common. It is used in later Greek, where the use seems developed by orators, and intended for the vivid presentation of past events, so that perhaps it should be called a Rhetorical rather than an Historical Present. But the Historical Present is not found in the Homeric poems. Brugmann is frank, as usual, in stating the embarrassment this gives him. He finds its lack in Homer difficult to account for. "It can hardly be due," he says, "to the character of the epic diction." The use of the present in relating past occurrences is so natural that it may well be thought to have developed independently in Vedic, Greek and Latin—early in Vedic and perhaps in Latin, later in Greek and hardly as an Historical Present in the proper sense of the term. Its absence in Homer seems to me a good reason for not asserting its presence in the original Indo-Germanic. (2) But my second objection to his statement is, if well grounded, fatal to his theory. The pres. indic. is not timeless in its form; it has in its ending a mark of the present time. How does the form of the present differ from that of the unaugmented aorist?—*bharati* from *bharat*. The original endings for the present seem to have been *mi*, *si*, *ti*, *men* or *mes*, *te*, *nti*;

for the aorist, *m, s, t, men or mes, te, nt*. Where they differ, the difference consists in the addition of *i* to the aorist to form the present. What is the force of this *i*? Fick did not hesitate in his lectures to identify it with the *i* in *Romai*. "It means *here*," he said. "While *bharat* means '*bearing he*,' *bharati* means '*bearing he here*,' i.e., '*he bears*,' and '*he is now bearing*.'" And by the addition of this suffix to the unaugmented aorist, the old pretemporal, timeless form, we get the first tense in the proper sense of the term, the present tense. This formation determined the later character of the aorist, the indefinite preterite. If we leave out of account, for the moment, the unreal use of the aorist, which I think a special case of its inceptive use, all the other uses of the Greek aorist that I have quoted fall naturally into two classes. There are: (1) Its comparatively rare uses as a present and future and, the gnomic aorist, which belong to the old indefinite or timeless tense. The characteristic of all of them is the ignoring of the idea of time, e.g., *ὡς τις ὄρουσ ἥριπεν* (Any fall of an oak, no matter when, will serve as an example to illustrate his fall). (2) Then there are the ordinary uses of the aorist as an indefinite preterite, the use left to it after the formation of the present. What took place when the present was developed? Let this line

past,	pres.,	fut.,

 represent the province of the old timeless aorist. When the present was developed it was divided thus,

past,		pres.,	fut.,

 the present and future falling to the new tense. That the future was once represented by the present seems to me probable, and the use of the present *εἶμι* = *ibo*, for the future as well as the present seems a remnant of this use.

A word here about the inceptive force of the aorist. Besides the tenses of the verb denoting absolute time (the past, present and future), and those denoting relative time (the pluperfect and future perfect), we have two which denote the mode as well as the time of the act, the imperfect and perfect. For most acts, as regards their time, can be thought of in three modes; they are beginning, in progress, or completed. With the formation of the present the mode of duration was appropriated for it, and presently that of completion was taken for the perfect, leaving the mode of inception for the aorist. Interesting here may be the one remark Dionysius Thrax adds to his enumeration of the tenses. "Of the six," he says, "we have three *συγγέμεται* or related pairs—the present and imperfect, the perfect and pluperfect, and aorist and future." In the last pairing he evidently has in view the inceptive force of the aorist, which Krüger and Curtius (I think) believed to be a special and primary force. (Ed. Uhlig, p. 53.)

But, it will be objected, you say that all parts of the finite verb are developed directly or indirectly from the strong aorist. How can this be true when such a verb as *εἶναι*, to be, a verb of some importance and

antiquity, has no aorist? To the question of the relation between the imperfect and the aorist a good deal of attention has been given since Lobeck first essayed its solution. “*ἔσθη* is like *ἔφη* in formation,” said Lobeck; “*ἔφη* is the imperfect of *φημί*; therefore *ἔσθη* must have been originally the imperfect of an older *στημι*, and *ἴσθημι* is a later reduplicated form of the present.” Delbrück, in support of this, cites from the Vedas the forms *pāti* for *pibati*, and *dhāti* for *didhāti*, i.e., *θησι* for *τίθησι*, or *θημι* for *τίθημι*; and Brugmann says, “The distinction between the present and the strong aorist was merely syntactic, not formal. Forms of the same class were used, now in a present, now in an aorist sense, e.g., *ἔφην*, *ἔγραφον*, *ἔγεμον*, *ἐνιπτόμην* are imperfects, but *ἔσθην*, *ἔτραπον*, *ἔβλαστον*, *ἐγένονμην* are aorists, though they are homogeneous forms.” Brugmann, you see, accepts Lobeck’s conjecture, supported as it is by Delbrück, that *ἔφην* and *ἔσθην* were to begin with the same tense. This seems to me probable, especially as *ἔφην* is so often used as an aorist. But if *ἔφην* is aorist as well as imperfect, what of *ἦν*, I was? It is surely about as often aorist as imperfect. The verb *εἶναι*, once significant and transitive, has been reduced to a substantive verb or copula, the meaning of which is such that it does not need several forms to express its past, which presents in itself no varieties of meaning. And with regard to form, *ἦν* ought to be called a second, or strong aorist. But no doubt some of these strong aorists have, as Brugmann believes, become imperfects. In some verbs the present has the same form of the root as had the original aorist, e.g., *ἔσμι φημί φέρω*; but the form of the root was usually changed in the present, by gradation, as in *λείπω* (aor. *ἔλιπον*) or by expansion as in *λαμβάνω* (aor. *ἔλαβον*). When the form of the root was thus changed, a new tense was formed from it to express for the past what the present tense expressed for the present, viz., an action then in progress, e.g., *ἔλειπον* and *ἐλάμβανον*, and *ἔλιπον* and *ἔλαβον* remained aorists. But when the strong aorist stem remained unchanged in the present, the old strong aorists became imperfects, e.g., *ἦν*, *ἔφην*, *ἔφερον*. The stem *ἔσ* developed no new aorist in Greek (in Latin it borrowed the perfect *fui*: I have become); *φημί* formed a first aorist *εἶπα*, *φέρω* borrowed the aorist *ἔνεγκα*. That some imperfects were originally aorists, as both Brugmann and Delbrück suppose, is rendered still more probable by the use of the imperfect as an aorist in Homer—the descriptive imperfect, which Monro describes as producing in a measure the effect of the Historical Present for epic diction.

It remains to add a word about the formation of the first or weak aorist. From forms of the present, like *λείπω*, which differed from the second aorist in stem, were formed an aorist ending in *α*, or more usually *σα*. These had at first the personal endings of the strong aorist

in all persons but the first, as is clear from Homeric forms like $\acute{\epsilon}\beta\acute{\eta}\sigma\epsilon\tau\omicron$ and $\acute{\alpha}\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon\tau\epsilon$; and $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\epsilon\sigma\omicron\nu$ has preserved the strong aorist endings. But the rest have assimilated to the α of the first person all other personal endings but that of the third sing., which remains ϵ . How did this aorist originate? Curtius thought it the result of composition. It consisted of the root + *asam*, Latin *eram*, Greek $\acute{\eta}\nu$ (= $e + es\ m$). This theory is abandoned to-day; a little too readily, Fick used to say. But perhaps the weak aorist rather followed the analogy of one of the forms in which the imperfect of $\acute{\epsilon}\mu\acute{\iota}$ ($e + es\ m$) appears, than resulted from composition with it; for ($e + es\ m$) appears in Greek as $\acute{\eta}\nu$ or $\acute{\eta}\alpha$, α being a common equivalent for m —and perhaps this form $\acute{\eta}\alpha$ became the starting point for aorists in α . But what of the usual ending $\sigma\alpha$? Of course $\acute{\eta}\alpha$ was for old $\acute{\eta}\sigma\alpha$, and we find the third plural in *Æolie* as $\acute{\epsilon}'\sigma\sigma\alpha\nu$. If this presupposes a first sing. $\acute{\epsilon}'\sigma\sigma\alpha$, as Fick believed (the form is not found in the rather scanty remains of *Æolic*), the new ending might easily be got by false division, for the root is $\epsilon\varsigma$, and $\sigma\alpha$ might well appear to be an ending.



**University of Toronto
Library**

**DO NOT
REMOVE
THE
CARD
FROM
THIS
POCKET**

**Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File"
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU**

